May 11, 2005

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats
and International Relations.

From: Dr. R. Nicholas Palarino, Senior Policy Analyst.

Subject: Briefing memorandum for the hearing, *Fostering Democracy in the
Middle East: Defeating Terrorism with Ballots*, scheduled for Tuesday,
May 17, 2005 at 10:00 a.m., room 2154 Rayburn House Office Building
in Washington, D.C.

PURPOSE OF THE HEARING

The hearing will examine the impact of US efforts to foster democracy in the Middle East.

HEARING ISSUES

1. **What types of democratic reforms have been instituted in Middle East?**

2. **What challenges confront efforts to promote democracy in the Middle East?**

BACKGROUND

President George W. Bush, in a speech to the United States Chamber of Commerce commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, discussed the issue of democracy in the Middle East:

> Our commitment to democracy is … tested in the Middle East, …, and must be a focus of American policy for decades to come. In many nations of the Middle East—countries of great strategic importance—democracy has not yet taken root. And the questions arise: Are the peoples of the Middle East somehow beyond the reach of liberty? Are millions of men and women and children condemned by history or culture to live in despotism? Are they alone never to know freedom, and never even to have a choice in the matter? I, for one, do not believe it. I believe every person has the ability and the right to be free. **(Web Resource 1)**

At a press conference with the United Kingdom's Prime Minister Tony Blair, President Bush added, "I've got faith in democracies to promote peace. And that's why I'm such a strong believer that the way forward in the Middle East—the broader Middle East, is to promote democracy." **(Web Resource 2)**

In President Bush's second inaugural address he said, "The concerted effort of free nations to promote democracy is a prelude to our enemies' defeat." This promotion of democracy in other nations, Bush contends, will help protect the United States because democracies engage in dialogue rather than fighting one another, and rarely will democracies harbor terrorists and export terrorism to other countries.
(Web Resource 3)

The post-9/11 national security strategy of confronting terrorism and empowering free political and economic movements, often called "The Bush Doctrine" has particular appeal, and meets significant resistance, in the Middle East.

Democracy

Democracy is commonly defined as a form of government under which the power to alter the laws and structures of a state lies, ultimately, with the citizens. Under such a system, legislative decisions are made by the people themselves or by representatives who act through the consent of the people, as enforced by elections and the rule of law.
(Web Resource 4)

Former Israeli Minister Natan Sharansky, in his book, *The Case for Democracy*, states "Though there are a number of features commonly associated with modern democratic society—the rule of law, constitutions, independent courts, political parties, a meaningful opposition, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and so on—above all, democracies are closely linked in most people's minds with elections." **(Attachment 1, pg. 72)**

Mr. Sharansky said a simple way to determine whether a country is democratic, free and citizens have the right to dissent is to apply the town square test: "Can a person walk into the middle of the town square and express his or her views without fear of arrest, imprisonment, or physical harm? If he [or she] can, then that person is living in a free society. If not, it's a fear [tyrannical] society." **(Attachment 1, pgs. 40-41)**

The Democratic Peace Theory

The basis for President Bush's vision of promoting democracy is the democratic peace theory first espoused by Immanuel Kant (German philosopher) in a 1795 essay *Perpetual Peace*. Kant postulates:

> The republican [representative government] constitution, besides the purity of its origin (having sprung from the pure source [the citizens] of the concept of law), also gives a favorable prospect for the desired consequence, i.e., perpetual peace. The reason is this: if the consent of the citizens is required in order to decide that war should be declared (and in this constitution it cannot but be the case), nothing is more natural than that they would be very cautious in commencing such a poor game, decreeing for themselves all the calamities of war. **(Web Resource 5)**

In addition to restraints on war by citizens, democracies deliberate and eventually compromise. These deliberations transcend into the international arena and allow states to discuss and compromise rather than go to war over disagreements. Additionally, the pacifying effect of trade, especially between democracies, increases the interdependence of nations and raises the cost of going to war. **(Web Resource 6)**

Mr. Sharansky states, "As the United States learned during Vietnam, and the government of Spain learned during the recent war in Iraq, no democratic government will be able to fight a protracted war that the majority of its citizens does not support…. Thus, the critical factor that prevents democratic nations from fighting against each other is not values that are particular to democratic people but rather the fact that *the power of a democratic government is ultimately dependent on the popular will*." **(Attachment 1, pg. 79)**

Middle East Political Systems and Democratic Reform Initiatives

The Middle East is a term traditionally applied to the nation states of southwest Asia and northeast Africa lying west of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. The three main cultures of the Middle East are Persian, Arabic and Turkish.
(Web Resource 7)

Freedom House, a non-profit organization, published the report, *Democracy's Century,* assessing the organizing principles by which countries are governed, how their leaders are selected and the types of political systems that have governed nations. **(Attachment 2)**

The report divides countries on the basis of their political practices into several categories.

> *Authoritarian regimes* are one-party states and military dictatorships where there are significant human rights violations.

> *Monarchies* are divided into three groups: constitutional monarchies, in which a constitution delineates the powers of the monarch and in which some power may have devolved to elected legislatures and other bodies; traditional monarchies; and absolute monarchies, in which monarchic power was exercised in despotic fashion.

> *Restricted democratic practices* are regimes in which a dominant ruling party controls the levers of power, including access to the media, and the electoral process in ways that preclude a meaningful challenge to its political hegemony. In the first half of the century, states with restricted democratic practices included countries which denied universal franchise to women, racial minorities, and the poor and landless.

> *Democracies* are political systems whose leaders are elected in competitive multi-party and multi-candidate processes in which opposition parties have a legitimate chance of attaining power or participating in power.

In general, and for the purpose of this memo, the 16 countries and a territory of the Middle East include:

- The authoritarian regimes of Syria, Iran, Lebanon (in transition), and Iraq (in transition);
- The monarchies of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Jordan;
- The administered Palestinian territories;
- The restricted democracies of Egypt and Yemen; and
- The democracies of Turkey and Israel.
  (Web Resource 10)

Authoritarian Regimes[1]

Syria

Recent Reform Initiatives:

- 2002: The first privately-owned political weekly was granted a license and has since become a critic of government performance. The paper is owned by the son of the Syrian Defense Minister.

- 2005: Syria released some elderly political prisoners and Kurdish dissidents imprisoned during the 2004 Kurdish riots.

Iran

Recent Reform Initiatives:

- The president derived key political support from reformist-oriented students, youths, women, and other segments of society, who have occasionally demonstrated against the hardliners. The hardliners have generally blocked institutional reform.

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[1] A complete description of Middle East governments and recent democratic reforms is provided by the Congressional Research Service analysts Mr. Jeremy M. Sharp, and Mr. Aaron D. Pina, from the Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division. The assessment can be found at Attachment 3

Lebanon

Recent Reform Initiatives:

- 2004: The government has pursued reforms to revive and sustain growth with the private sector; consolidate improvement in public sector finances; and stabilize the monetary situation.

- 2005: The government reshuffled the cabinet in the wake of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and citizens have called for the election of pro-Lebanese instead of pro-Syrian officials.

Iraq

Recent Reform Initiatives:

- 2003: Iraqi officials introduced reforms to privatize many state controlled assets.

- 2004: Iraqi women have seen increases in equality under the law and representation in government institutions.

- 2005: Elections have been held for the Transitional National Assembly.

- 2005: Continuing economic and financial reforms have been undertaken to prepare for accession to the World Trade Organization.

- 2005: The transitional government continues to reshape military and security sector.

Monarchies

Bahrain—Traditional

Recent Reform Initiatives:

- 2002: Bahrain held a referendum on a new national action charter, establishing procedures for electing a 40-member national assembly.

- 2002: Bahrain granted workers, including non-citizens, the right to form and join unions. There are now 39 trade unions in Bahrain, and workers are permitted to conduct work stoppages.

- 2003: The Middle East Peace Initiative assisted in launching an Arab judicial reform program in Bahrain.

Kuwait—Traditional

Recent Reform Initiatives:

- 2004: The government proposed a bill granting voting rights to women; rejected by the Assembly.

Oman—Traditional

Recent Reform Initiatives:

- 2003: Sultan Qaboos named a woman to the rank of minister. One year later, he appointed two female ministers for Higher Education and Tourism, respectively.

Saudi Arabia—Traditional

Recent Reform Initiatives:

- 2004: Crown Prince Abdullah started a "National Dialogue Forum," allowing reformers to hold open discussions on previously taboo subjects, such as women's rights, official corruption, and abuses by religious police.

- 2004: The government permitted the first visit of an international human rights organization (Human Rights Watch), and authorized the country's first indigenous human rights organization.

- 2005: The Saudi government held three rounds of municipal elections on February 10, March 3, and April 20, 2005, in which male Saudi citizens cast votes for half the members of 178 municipal councils in the country's first nation-wide elections.

United Arab Emirates—Traditional

Recent Reform Initiatives:

- 2003: One emirate (province) appointed five women to its own 40-seat consultative council.

- 2004: Another emirate appointed the first female minister to head a combined economy and planning ministry.

Qatar—Constitutional

Recent Reform Initiatives:

- 2003: A new Constitution was adopted in a national referendum with women participating in the vote.

- 2003: Municipal council elections resulted in the election of Qatar's first female candidate.

- 2003: The Emir appointed Sheikha bint Ahmed al-Mahmoud as Education Minister. This appointment signified the first appointment ever of a female cabinet minister in any Persian Gulf state.

- 2004: The Emir issued a new labor law, which gives Qatari nationals the right to form associations with legal status and allows workers to go on strike.

Jordan—Constitutional

Recent Reform Initiatives:

- 2003: The Education Ministry, in conjunction with United States Agency for International Development, the World Bank, and other international lenders, developed a program called the Educational Reform for a Knowledge-based Economy—a $380 million, five-year comprehensive educational reform plan. Under this plan, Jordan, with help from Microsoft and Cisco Systems, has built computer labs in several public schools and developed a modern curriculum which incorporates information technology.

- 2005: King Abdullah announced an initiative for decentralizing political and fiscal authority in Jordan by establishing a number of regional assemblies and empowering them with many of the responsibilities currently enjoyed by the parliament and central government.

Administered Territories

Palestinian Territories of the West Bank & Gaza Strip

Recent Reform Initiatives:

- 2002-current: The Palestinian Constitution has been completed and signed by former President Arafat (awaiting referendum).

- 2004: The minister of finance has implemented economic reforms that target increased transparency and accountability.

- 2005: The new president consolidated the security services for better accountability and management.

- 2005: The Palestinian legislature outlawed all private ownership of firearms.

Restricted Democratic Practice

Egypt

Recent Reform Initiatives:

- 2003: The government passed legislation to establish the National Council of Human Rights.

- 2004: The president reshuffled the cabinet, bringing in several young, reform minded ministers in order to galvanize a moribund economy.

- 2004: The major political party held its annual party conference where officials announced plans to amend the 1977 political partys' law, which governs the legalization of political parties.

- 2005: The president announced plans to ask Parliament to amend article 76 of the Constitution to allow for multiple candidates in presidential elections.

Yemen

Recent Reform Initiatives:

- 2004: The government initiated wide-ranging economic reforms suggested by the International Monetary Fund.

- 2005: There have been continuing efforts made to centralize control within the Yemeni state.

Democracy

Turkey

Recent Reform Initiatives:

- 2003: Parliament passed a new foreign investment law to guarantee equal rights for foreign investors and ease procedures for establishing companies.

- 2004: Parliament limited the power of the National Security Council (MGK), the influential, military-dominated civilian-military government body which traditionally has made binding security and foreign policy recommendations to the government.

- 2001-2005: The Turkish Government passed a series of reform packages (constitutional amendments) that harmonizes Turkey's standards on fundamental rights with those of the European Union.

Israel

    Recent Reform Initiatives:

- 2004: The prime minister has initiated coalition discussions with othr parties in an effort to regain a majority in the Knesset and advance Gaza disengagement.

- 2005: The State has instituted policies to combat government corruption

In addition to Middle East government reform initiatives, reform proposals have emerged from nongovernmental organization (NGO) initiatives. For example, the Arab Non-Governmental Summit of March 2004 held in Beirut, Lebanon and attended by representatives of 13 Arab countries declared that the Arab world's internal problems demand that the region embark on a path of reform or risk facing long-term instability. Similar Arab NGO conferences have advocated political reform and the creation of national pacts that could bridge secular and Islamist differences. **(Attachment 4)**

Other constituencies, such as the business community, also have put forward their own visions of reform for the region. The Arab Business Council Declaration of January 2004 calls for respecting the rule of law and enhancing transparency and accountability in the Arab world. These initiatives may not be as comprehensive or target as broad an audience as other reform proposals, but their significance lies in their demonstration that reform is a key priority across diverse sectors of Middle East society. **(Attachment 4)**

US Efforts to Promote Democracy in the Middle East

There are numerous US spending programs designed exclusively for promoting democracy in the Middle East. The traditional US public diplomacy programs (e.g. international broadcasting, educational exchange programs) are classified as democracy promoting activities. The invasion of Iraq is also an action that is designed to promote democracy in the Middle East. And there are economic actions which assist in opening closed societies and promoting democracy. **(Attachment 3)**

Some programs, such as the State Department's Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF), focus heavily on democracy promotion, while others, such as the State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), include democracy promotion as part of a wider range of activities geared toward supporting both political and economic reform. Congress also appropriates Economic Support Funds (ESF) for all United States Agency for International Development (USAID) programs in the Middle East, which include good governance programming as a component of the agency's much larger development effort. **(Attachment 3)**

Witnesses

Panel I witnesses consist of Former Israeli Minister Natan Sharansky, author of *The Case for Democracy: The Power to Overcome Tyranny and Terror*, a book the President has read, and often quotes.

The other witness, Mr. Mithal Al-Alusi, secretary of the Democratic Party of Iraqi Nation and former director general of the interim government's de-Ba'athification Commission, is a Sunni. Mr. Al-Alusi is under constant threat from Iraqi insurgents because he has called for improved relations between Iraq and Israel. His two sons were killed by the insurgents.

The witnesses were asked to answer the following questions:

- How is the Administration implementing the Bush Doctrine in Middle Eastern countries?

- What effect is the Bush Doctrine having on Middle Eastern countries?

- In which Middle Eastern countries is it permissible for a person to walk into a town square and express his or her views without fear of arrest, imprisonment, or physical harm?

- Are the people in the Middle East prepared for democratic reforms?

    o To what extent is the Islamic faith compatible with democracy?

    o To what extent will the systematic discrimination against women in some Middle Eastern countries make democratization more difficult?

    o How will the absence of freedom in some Middle Eastern countries make it more difficult for the people to embrace democracy?

- Is the Bush Doctrine working in Middle Eastern countries?

- How should the Bush Doctrine be changed or modified to encourage emerging democratic reforms in Middle Eastern countries?

DISSCUSSION OF HEARING ISSUES

1. **What types of democratic reforms have been instituted in Middle Eastern?**

There have been significant developments that could lead countries on the path toward democracy, and a long list of democratic reforms instituted in Middle Eastern states, since President Bush's announcement the United States will promote democracy in other countries. Major developments include the elections in the Palestinian Territories and Iraq, the departure of Syrian troops from Lebanon, and the demonstrations by Egypt's citizens for more election options.

Many Middle Eastern countries have instituted reforms which could be considered democratic. For example, some Middle Eastern countries are allowing increased citizen participation in politics; other countries are allowing women to participate in elections; some now allow groups to openly disagree with government policies, and others are allowing more access to information. **(Attachment 3)**

However, many of these reforms are hollow and overshadowed by monarchies which will not relinquish power to a legislature elected by the people. In some of these monarchies women are still disenfranchised. Other countries have a ruling party controlling the levers of power precluding a meaningful challenge to the party in power.

Mr. Natan Sharansky's democratic town square test, *Can a person walk into the middle of the town square and express his or her views without fear of arrest, imprisonment, or physical harm? If he [or she] can, then that person is living in a free society. If not, it's a fear [tyrannical] society*, **(Attachment 1, pgs. 42-43)** could become a standard for countries in the Middle East. Until citizens of Middle Eastern countries feel they can openly criticize policies without fear of arrest, imprisonment or physical harm, it will be difficult to build a democratic society.

2. What challenges confront efforts to promote democracy in the Middle East?

Bolstering US credibility in the Middle East should be a key priority for the United States. Once countries in the region view US efforts as credible they will be more receptive to change. Continued US efforts pressing for a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian issue and stabilizing Iraq should also help the United States gain credibility.

In July 2002, a United Nations commissioned panel of thirty Arab experts from a variety of disciplines issued the first Arab Human Development Report (AHDR). The report is a self-critical look at what has gone wrong in the Arab world. **(Web Resource 8)**

The report states, in the Arab world, there is a sense of hopelessness. This conclusion is based on the fact that 51 percent of older adolescents wanted to emigrate from the region. The report found that there is a poverty of capabilities and poverty of opportunities. Ultimately, the report finds the Arab world's ills are rooted in deficits of freedom, women's empowerment, and knowledge. The region's shortcomings in these three areas impede the Arab world from reaching its true potential, effectively isolating it from the rest of the world. **(Web Resource 8)**

The Arab world has the lowest level of political freedom of any region in the world. Using a variety of indicators that measure political participation—civil liberties, political rights, and civil society—the region falls short, indicating a lack of voice and accountability. **(Web Resource 8)**

On women's empowerment, the AHDR highlights Arab women's lack of political and economic participation; women occupied only 3.5 percent of parliamentary seats as compared to 11 percent in sub-Saharan Africa and 12.9 percent in Latin America. **(Web Resource 8)**

Finally, the report chronicles the region's knowledge deficit, noting, among other statistics, that the Arab world has the lowest level of information and communication technology access of any region in the world, that only 0.6 percent of the population uses the Internet, and that only 1.2 percent own personal computers. **(Web Resource 8)**

The report concludes with a call for reform, saying the Arab world is at a crossroads, casting the region's choices in stark terms: its governments can either continue with the status quo, producing ineffective policies that will not meet the region's challenges, or they can strive for an Arab renaissance, anchored in human development that will be actively pursued. **(Web Resource 8)**

Recommendations to overcome some of the challenges are discussed in a US Institute of Peace monograph by Ms. Mona Yacoubian from the United States Institute of Peace. **(Attachment 4)**

- US policymakers should continually emphasize that even Arabs are calling for reforms. Consistent diplomatic pressure, coupled with financial incentives for positive movement on reform, offer a chance democratic reforms will be accepted by some Middle Eastern countries.

- Continued outreach to moderate Islamist reformers is important. Given the fact that Islamist reformers have a strong popular appeal, the United States can no longer afford to call for democratic change in the region while ignoring one of its most powerful political forces—Islamist reformers.

- The United States should identify key benchmarks that adequately measure the progress of political reform in each country. The creation of specific reform-oriented goals might offer a useful action guide for understanding what needs to be accomplished and what other actions need to be taken.

- The United States should consider establishing a quasi-public, privately run Middle East foundation as the key mechanism for administering political-reform promotion projects. A Middle East foundation would provide the necessary arm's length from the US government, creating an important buffer for sensitive political- reform projects.

- Finally, at a strategic level, US policymakers should reconcile US counterterrorism policies with the goals of democracy promotion in the region. To date, regimes in the region are sent mixed messages. They are both asked to reform and to cooperate in the war on terror. A successful US policy for promoting reform in the region needs to answer the vexing question of how to nurture civil society while guarding against extremism.

WITNESSES

Panel I

Former Israeli Minister Natan Sharansky
Author of *The Case for Democracy: The Power of*
Freedom to Overcome Tyranny & Terror

Mr. Mithal Al-Alusi
Democratic Party of the Iraqi Nation

Panel II

Ms. Elizabeth Dugan
Vice President
International Republican Institute

Mr. Leslie Campbell
Director for Middle East Programs
National Democratic Institute for
International Affairs

Professor Febe Armanios
Professor for Middle Eastern Studies
Middlebury College

Mr. Khaled Suffuri (confirmed)
Chairman of the Board
Islamic Free Market Institute

Ms. Mona Yacoubian
Special Adviser Muslim World Initiative
United States Institute of Peace

ATTACHMENTS

1. Sharansky, Natan, *The Case for Democracy, The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny & Terror*, Perseus, Books: New York, 2004.

2. Freedom House, *Democracy's Century, A Survey of Global Political Change in the 20th Century*, updated July 7, 2004.

3. Mr. Jeremy Sharp and Mr. Aaron D. Pina, Middle East Policy Analysts, Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade Division, Congressional Research Service memorandum, *Democratic Initiatives in the Middle East*, to House Government Reform Committee, Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations, May 9, 2005.

4. Ms. Mona Yacoubian, Promoting Middle East Democracy, United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 136.

WEB RESOURCES

1. The White House, *President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East*, Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, United States Chamber of Commerce, Washington, DC, November 6, 2003, found at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html.

2. The White House, *President and Prime Minister Blair Discussed Iraq, Middle East,* November 12, 2004, found at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/11/20041112-5.html.

3. The White House, *President Sworn into Second Term*, January 20, 2005, found at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/20050120-1.html.

4. The Colombia Encyclopedia, Sixth edition, Democracy, found at http://www.bartleby.com/65/de/democrac.html.

WEB RESOURCES (cont.)

5. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, *Immanuel Kant*, found at
   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kant.

6. Foreign Affairs, *Ballots and Bullets: The Elusive Democratic Peace*,
   reviewed, found at http://www.foreignaffairs.org/author/joanne-gowa/index.html

7. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, *Middle East*, found at
   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_East.

8. United Nations Development Program, Arab Human Development Report
   2002, found at http://www.undp.org/rbas/ahdr/english2002.html